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ABSTRACT

State educational departments can take the initiative in assisting local resources to undertake the task of exploring alternative perspectives on lifelong learning. To provide leadership for those who plan, develop, and coordinate state programs or establish research priorities, state agencies need to re-examine their role in developing strategies to deal with the adult learner's changing needs. A few suggestions are (1) resource analysis--identify and appraise the range, nature, and use of educational resources in the state; (2) need identification--assess the range and intensity of educationally related interests and concerns among significant groups within the state; (3) guidance programming--identify essential and necessary conditions for designing, staffing, and evaluating a statewide adult guidance system; (4) report analysis--interpret and synthesize a variety of reports (census, manpower, industrial, etc.) to provide a basis for need analysis and long range planning; (5) survey analysis--design and conduct state survey research to identify significant resources as well as critical needs and problems; and (6) other state agency mapping--map agency and organizational territories according to their roles and goals as a basis for developing cooperative alliances to attack critical community problems and expand adult learning opportunities. (CSS)

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THE STATE AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

FOR

RESEARCH ON LIFELONG LEARNING

by
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THE STATE AGENCY PERSPECTIVE FOR RESEARCH ON LIFELONG LEARNING*

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The State Agency by its very existence is considered occupying a Leadership role. Basic to any discussion of leadership are the questions, who leads whom? in what functions? by what authority, and for what purposes? Leadership in lifelong learning can be many things, can belong to many agencies and can be exerted at different levels in the federal to state to local continuum.

State education agencies are engaged largely in activities of formal K-12 schooling, with concomitant responsibilities to plan, develop, and fund programs in adult and continuing education. Much of the effort is devoted to fiscal management and the monitoring of operational guidelines. Research on lifelong learning for planning and development of programs for adult learners remains a challenging opportunity.

However, state educational departments are logical agencies to take the initiative in assisting a variety of local resources including colleges, universities, businesses, foundations, et., to undertake the task of seriously exploring alternative perspectives on lifelong learning. Adult educational needs are now being perceived comprehensively, and must be addressed through programs ranging from basic

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literacy instruction to special postgraduate training. Public awareness and the ability and opportunities for adults to assess adult learning opportunities and resources must be broadened and deepened.

Within this country in recent years, interest in lifelong learning reflects an increasing amount of attention being focused upon the learning needs and activities of persons throughout the lifespan extending beyond traditional youth education and formal schooling. The federal level of concern can be noted in the Lifelong Learning provisions in P.L. 94-482, the Higher Education Act of 1976 (Title IB).

Among state agencies there exist varying degrees of commitment and involvement in lifelong learning through existing delivery systems, and in devising new ways or developing combinations of old and new ways to meet the lifelong educational need of adults. Concomitantly, there is variation in interpretation of the concept of lifelong learning among policy makers, administrators, legislators, educators, researchers and others interested in the concept. Clarification of the concept, and how it should or should not be related to existing and future federal and state programs, must be accomplished before implementation strategies can become a reality.

In Michigan over the last several years, the State Board of Education has been engaged in a number of activities designed to strengthen educational programs and activities for adults. Recently we developed a position paper on adult extended learning. We believe extended learning is an evolving concept. It represents a new perspective or attitude toward learners and learning throughout the life cycle. It not only includes a vertical time dimension--literally from birth to death--but

also a horizontal dimension encompassing all fields of knowledge, and an inner dimension that reflects the personal growth needs of human beings for self-expression and dignity. It emphasizes the ability for self-learning and the utilization of all educative resources, formal and informal.

In the discussion that follows, I have drawn literally from this 1977 paper entitled "Proposal on Extended Learning" developed by a Michigan Departmental Extended Learning Task Force made up of representation from the State Library, Adult and Continuing Education and Vocational Rehabilitation.

There is growing recognition of the wide diversity of adult education offerings and the many purposes, programs and populations served. We are a nation of learners. Research suggests that almost every American undertakes one or more learning activities every year. Consider the vast educational enterprises of business and industry, occupational training, inservice training, occupational upgrading, manpower development, management and executive training. Add to it education in labor unions, apprentice programs, training of foremen and shop stewards, and the enormous armed forces network involving correspondence study, televised courses, and classroom instruction. Plus, the educational work of churches and synagogues, community centers, civic organizations, voluntary groups and professional organizations, national health organizations, museums and galleries, libraries, government agencies, service clubs, and public television can be added.

These largely self-initiated learning activities account for perhaps two-thirds of the total learning effort of adults of which only a fraction is done for credit. Yet almost all of this study activity

and growth has occurred in a fragmented, disjointed and otherwise disorganized fashion. Some individual libraries are initiating programs and activities, while many colleges and universities are acting independently to launch programs. State government is responding on a variety of levels but in an uncoordinated manner.

Five major themes support the extended learning concept:

1. The encouragement of educational opportunity for many who conceive of education in forbidding terms of entrance exams, irrelevant requirements, and exorbitant expense.

2. Focus on the individual learner.

3. Ease of access to a learning experience through many means including technological and telecommunications.

4. Planned, coordinated use of all the learning resources of a community.

5. The community rather than the educational institution is placed at the center of the learning enterprise.

The proposal thus calls for an immensely complicated set of organizations and institutions to become related through an interdependent network. Included would be colleges and universities, libraries and museums, music, theatre and art institutes, business, industry, unions, the media, social agencies, and others.

You are aware of research endeavors pertaining to Vocational/Technical Education which have been conducted for several decades. These Research endeavors accelerated after legislation provided for Research Coordinating Units in State Vocational Education Departments. This research has been directed primarily toward the traditional high school student. The Career Education movement of the early seventies generated hundreds of Career Education projects, courses, workshops, seminars,

and programs. Most of the literature on Career Education has been concerned with defining Career Education, promoting Career Education or describing the processes and products of Career Education. Little empirical research concerned with Career Education for the adult learners is available.

While the Federal Government, through the U. S. Office of Education, has provided for many years special funds for research in vocational education, it was not until 1966 that Federal support for the development of demonstration research activities in adult basic or literacy education became a reality. A national research strategy for adult and continuing education has not yet been developed. The concept of life-long learning recognizes the need of many persons to upgrade their job skills, as well as providing a means for more productive participation in a complex society through the fulfilment of vocational and personal goals.

In order to provide leadership for those who plan, develop and coordinate state programs or establish research priorities, state agencies need to re-examine their roles and functions in light of developing strategies to deal with the changing needs of the adult learner. A few suggestions are listed:

I. RESOURCE ANALYSIS - Identify and appraise the range, nature, and use of educational resources in the State

A first priority for a State Agency is to know "What is happening and where it is happening." Consequently, we must be adept at gathering, organizing, and classifying information about existing resources. It may be necessary to develop a computer program so that rapid analysis

and retrieval of information is possible. Ways of classifying information must be assessed and determined. The important thing is to have a well conceived idea of human development which can be used in evaluating probable adequacy of education resources in the State.

A source of information for appraising community resources can come from awareness of what various communities have provided. While there are obvious limitations to the "normative approach" it can be useful in identifying potential gaps in important instructional, cultural, or recreational resources of a community. The need for this information places a responsibility upon the State Agency to maintain a continuing inflow of information regarding various communities which have been particularly alert to developing education resources.

A source for judging educational resources other than academic and professional entities can come from analyses of usage by important subculters in communities. If one looks at the community through the eyes of senior citizens, older high school drop-outs, dependent mothers, displaced workers, new imigrants, ABE students, unemployed and underemployed persons, we can gain a base for a different kind of evaluation of both the availability and the actual use of educational resources.

II. NEED IDENTIFICATION - Assess the range and the intensity of educationally related interests and concerns among significant groups within the State

The State Agency needs to know the most direct, and meaningful methods for determining (and monitoring) the interests and concerns of people. We must first be aware of significant sub-groupings (i.e., senior citizens, small businessmen, dependent mothers, expectant parents, released convicts, junior executives, newly elected officials, technicians) which share common concerns or interests within the group. The processes

of identifying significant sub-groups and determining common concerns and interests frequently go hand-in-hand.

More than 20 major studies have been conducted within the past five years concerning participation and interests of adults in further education. Most of the studies survey a sample of adults within a specified area, asking about interests, plans, past learning experiences, perceived barriers to educational opportunities, and the like. The responses are frequently obtained by field, mail, or telephone interviews. The omnibus interest survey distributed randomly in the community is not likely to yield any enduring results. Hurried response on a momentary basis to a mail box or telephone questionnaire by a preoccupied citizen provides an input to which all the amazing gyrations of the most sophisticated computers cannot give reliability. However, a carefully planned study, combining the best quantitative and qualitative investigative techniques, can yield important outcomes. Michigan's Adult Basic Education needs assessment has sought, through its stratified proportion multi-stage random sample, to adhere to the most stringent scientific rules of inquiry; and advance the art of information gathering by applying advanced methods such as factor analysis, parametric and nonparametric tests.

Sponsors of the above mentioned studies have frequently been state agencies having some responsibility for long-range planning in education. The models for research in past needs assessment studies tend to identify and describe present activities of participants, potential participants, and nonparticipants, usually grouping people within biographical and demographical classifications and generally describing the needs of social groupings.

We have insufficient data on learnings of nonparticipants. We know that a tremendous amount of learning takes place without any "education." We also realize adult learning is continuous without deliberate intent and the deliberate learning is frequently self-directed and self-initiated. This leads us to an implication for policy formulation. Should funds be made available for education or for learning, for individuals or for institutions?

Any strategy developed to implement lifelong learning and to influence policy formulation should consider and encourage varied and imaginative research designs which increase both the sophistication and the specificity of needs analysis. Current studies reveal wide differences in understanding and use of concepts such as 'education' and 'learning'; 'demand' and 'need.' Contemporary research seems to indicate that demand, meaning actual participation, is manifested by the 'privileged' (i.e., those with higher socio-economic status aspirations, but ~~not~~ participation in learning opportunities, is more frequently demonstrated by the less privileged. Notwithstanding tbhe above, there may be human needs (e.g., coping skills) responsive to lifelong learning cutting across degrees of privilege and which are not being satisfactorily met.

The State Agency must be able to identify significant sub-groups; we must also know the processes by which it can relate to them dynamically.

III. GUIDANCE PROGRAMMING - Identify the essential and necessary conditions for designing, staffing, and evaluating a statewide adult guidance system

It becomes increasingly clear that adults are largely unaware of their appitudes, interest and potentialities for development and even less aware of opportunities and resources within their community which might help them more nearly realize their potentialities. While increased promotion of educational, vocational, and avocational opportunities can help, all too frequently the preoccupied adult simply does not recognize any relationship between advertised opportunities and his own life. Almost everyone has met the housewife who was unaware of the community college and "never dreamed" she could enter college until some "super market conversation" with a casual friend led her to her first extension course.

One of the central purposes of a well designed and well advertised guidance program is to reduce the accidental and coincidental nature by which many adults seem to stumble into opportunities to develop their own potentiality.

The State Agency needs to know the essential ingredients and necessary conditions for developing an adult guidance program.

IV. REPORT ANALYSIS - Interpret and synthesize a variety of reports (i.e., census, manpower, industrial, etc.) which can provide a basis for need analysis and long range planning

Within State government, one can find a variety of reports which can be helpful in understanding communities and regions. State Agencies need to know how to locate, select, interpret and synthesize available reports pertaining to the needs and resources of the State. Such reports are not likely to reflect any previously undiscovered needs but instead can help in casting light on the additional facets

of previously identified needs and the extent to which various needs may become intensified. This is illustrated best in studies in housing and neighborhood deterioration, freeway development, zoning regulations, unemployment reports, etc. While the State Agency need not be the ultimate interpreter of the data, it can at least recognize when the data can be of assistance.

V. SURVEY ANALYSIS - Design and conduct survey research in the State to identify significant resources as well as critical needs and problems

There is little doubt that survey research is misued. This has been particularly true in disadvantaged areas where residents have developed a deep resentment for seemingly endless questions. It is doubtful that written questionnaires or interviews will obtain useful information from respondents that are basically resentful of the process. Consequently, any use of survey research must take into account the the necessary condition for achieving optimal results.

Adult, community, and continuing education leaders should know how to (a) identify target population, (b) determine if and when survey techniquest are warrented, (c) select a sample of respondents that will reflect the thinking of the population studied, (d) construct items that will illicit clear and useful responses, (e) understand basic statistical techniques for analyzing the significance of the data, and (f) interpret the data within the context of other important and available information about the community.

Such skills can be taught in the graduate classroom but they must be practiced in practical field situations if they are to be incorporated as a basic competency of lifelong education. It is a competency in which

the leader should be sufficiently competent to serve as a consultant to other community leaders who may need to conduct survey research.

VI. OTHER STATE AGENCY MAPPING - Map agency and organizational territories according to their self-perceived roles and goals as a basis for developing cooperative alliances to attack critical community problems and expand adult learning opportunites

State Agencies should be able to identify the pattern of inter-organizational relationships and the potential capacity for cooperative alliances. To achieve this goal, the State Agency should know how to (a) obtain information about agencies and organizations concerned with individual and community problems (b) determine their specific areas of concern, and self-perceived roles in responding to the problems and needs, (c) to ascertain level of awareness of the role and function of companion agencies, and (d) to establish situations that will enhance their likelihood of entering into cooperative alliances. Someone has said that community action occurs at the points where paths of self-interest intersect. The problem in most State Governments is that many agencies simply are so busy sniffing out the trails within their self-proclaimed territories that they are oblivious to other pathways and territories. Such unawareness can lead to conflict. The State Agency needs an updated map of pathways and territories. The State Agency should then be able to initiate, organize, coordinate, conduct, supervise and utilize research data in order to exercise leadership in the development of educational programs in a coordinating role with federal and local agencies.

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